

HISTORY OF SENATOR DANIEL BROWN GILLHAM

By Cora Cole Fish

Background:

When the original French family of Count de Guillaume came to England with William the Conqueror in 1066, they remained in England. Gradually they changed the French name: Gillian, Gillham, and Gillam, so all three are from this original French origin. Count de Guillaume was presented with a Coat of Arms by William the Conqueror in 1066 for his outstanding service in the Battle of Hastings. Early marriage into British families (from Burk's Peerage and other British records) show the following: Sir William Devereaux Gilliam married Lady Dorothy, the Earle of Pembroke's daughter. Lancastrian's beheaded this Earle, July 27, 1469. Sir Richard Devereaux Gilliam was the eldest son of Walter, Viscount Hereford, and the ancestor of Robert Jarrett who married Sarah Branley. Their son Devereaux, married Edith Ellis, born in Henrico County, Vir., 1743. Sarah Gilliam married George Raulstone, a direct descendent of Lord Elgin and his wife, Lady Margaret Creighton.

I first got the above information from Miss Louise Trevous, of Edwardsville, Illinois and later was able to verify it myself in Burk's Peerage, from British Ship Sailings records and other assorted histories. I have much more but not of special interest in this early Alton history of Daniel B. Gillham.

The three sons of Sir Richard Devereaux Gillian (some histories show the surname spelled Gillham) came to America, 1730, on the ship Constance. William was 27 years of age, John (or Joseph) 21 and Thomas was 18. They came over with the Royal Commission to survey and map the Cominion of Virginia.

Thomas Gillham was born in 1712 in England, possibly in Ireland, as histories differ about the place. But he was definitely of French and English descent, not Irish. Constant trouble in Ireland at that period and long after too kept many English troops and statesmen in Ireland to quell Irish Rebellions, so many British people were stationed there for different periods of time. However, Irish histories do not show Gillians, Gillams nor Gillhams as citizens of Ireland at that time. After the surveying and mapping was over it is quite possible all three returned to England to report and give the maps to the King or his Council. Personally, I think they undoubtedly did return to England because British ship records show these same three brothers sailed on the George, from England to America, in 1735. They first settled in Virginia. The Virginia "Magazine of History and Biography" in Vol. XIV, page 238, under date of Dec. 19, 1738 states:

"Presents: The Governor

To Thomas Gilliam one thousand acres in Brunswick County on both sides of the Meherrin River joining the Land of Henry Briggs."

As to just why this land gift there is no statement, only the above. As all later histories gave Thomas Gillham's name spelled Gillham, at least our branch of the family have stuck to that spelling. As these three

spellings of the name appear all over America today it is likely the other two brothers used other spellings to suit their own preference.

Thomas lived first in Virginia and married Mary Meade. They had nine children, seven sons and four daughters: Charles, Ezekiel, William, Thomas, James, John, Isaac, Sally and Susannah; the other two daughters apparently died in infancy or early in life since there are no records with their names. These children were all born in Virginia. Mary Meade died and Thomas married Peggy Campbell. Undoubtedly some of these children were by Peggy Campbell as I know John (grandfather of Daniel B. Gillham) was the son of Peggy Campbell Gillham.

John, the 4th son, was born at Augusta County, Virginia on Jan. 4, 1756 and died in Madison County, Illinois on Dec. 13, 1834.

U. S. Archives (Washington D. C.) states John was a Lieutenant in the Revolution, commissioned at Columbia, S. C. He was one of seven sons and two sons-in-law of Thomas Gillham, all fighting in the Revolution. One son-in-law was killed. There are several records of John's being paid and after the death his children also collected pension money that was still due him in 1834 and 1835. His grave at Wanda Cemetery, Wanda, Illinois, has a D. A. R. marker. His service record shows dates are March 23, 1776 and discharged June 1, 1888 (Thomas Brandon's Regiment). On his discharge he immediately reinlisted until 1783.

John married Sarah Clark in South Carolina: They had ten children: Margaret, Susannah, Elizabeth, James, William Tyderus, Clark, Charles, John, Susan and Mary. The first marriage license issued in Madison County was to James Gillham and Polly Good. Brink's History of Madison County gives this fact on Page 74. The Thomas Gillham family moved from Virginia to the Camden District, South Carolina in 1763 and the sons came from there to Kentucky and Illinois. John arrived in Illinois June 10, 1802, settled in Madison County on Sect. 19, Township 4 North, Range 8 West, on the west bank of Cahokia Creek, then later moved to Section 1, same township and range. This farm land is now part of the Standard Oil Refineries and remained in the Gillham family until my grandmother, Adeline Harrison Gillham, sold it to the Oil Co.

John II married Phebe Dunagin, of Madison County, Illinois. Their son, Daniel Brown Gillham (my grandfather), was born in 1891. He first married Lucretia Smith, Madison Co., 1849. They had two children: Mary Eliza (who later married Warren W. Lowe of Alton) and Willis. Both Willis and his mother died at his birth. Mary Eliza died in 1922. She had two daughters and one son: Sadie, Ben, and Susan. Susan is still living and is Mrs. John Olmstead of Alton.

Daniel B. Gillham married his second wife, Virginia Harrison, 1858. Virginia was born in 1839 and died in 1872. They had six children: Willard, 1868, Nannie, 1862, Edith 1863, Alice, 1866, Lillian, 1868, and Virginia, 1871.

Daniel was educated in Illinois and was a farmer and a lawyer but considered himself a farmer first and a lawyer second. He experimented extensively with cattle, hogs and grains (for animal feeding) and was so successful he was known as an authority throughout the state. He was a devoted Baptist and strong Democrat all his life, and a close personal friend of William Jennings Bryan. He traveled over Illinois to electionair for Bryan for president. Politics were not his own goal at all but the good of Illinois and particularly having mid and Southern Illinois better represented in Springfield where he felt they did not get their share of state allotments and representation did finally get him to run for Senator. He held office several years and was vice president and president of the Board of Agriculture for over 20 years. He finally resigned from the Board of Agriculture because he did not think anyone person should hold office any longer. He was a Trustee for Illinois University for many years and insistent that Illinois have the first and finest Agricultural University anywhere. Even after the Agricultural University was set up he continued to fight for more money for it. He saw the future would demand highly trained and very well educated farmers, not only know everything about soil, crops, and animal husbandry, but also about machinery and management. For his own farms he bought all the new mechanical helps that came out . . . and had the usual difficulties when things broke down trying to get good repairmen to fix things. He also bought anything new that came out in mechanical household items for his wife. She had the first sewing machine in this part of the country and people came from miles and miles around to see it. As he was well off financially his wife had her own carriage and a fine team of horses. Such city luxuries for a farmers wife were criticized by some of his neighbors but others, who could afford it, soon gave their wives the comforts and luxuries, too.

Today in my living room I have the "parlor" set of furniture from their farm and some bedroom furniture, silver and jewelry that I treasure very highly. While Senator Gillham was in the Senate at Springfield and also on the Board of Agriculture, the question came up as to whether oleo margarine should be allowed sold in the food markets. This was an extremely controversial issue with so many fine dairy products raised in the state. Also many legislators, senators and some agricultural board members honestly questioned the food value of oleo and it undersold butter. At the time oleo sold for six cents a pound and butter for 12 cents or slightly over 12. There were no laws about special labels so much oleo was sold as cheap butter, and of course, farmers were furious about that. Being such a farmer himself, everyone assumed Senator Gillham would be one of the leading fighters of oleo margarine. Instead he took the attitude and persuaded other legislators to also, that oleo was good food as he proved by laboratory tests of it he had made and paid for himself; it was within the means of many poor people who simply could not afford real butter and in order to be sure no one could be fooled by it the manufacturers should not be allowed to use any color in it. But if a housewife wanted to color it herself to make it more attractive to eat, he also said she should have the right to do it and a small container of yellow food coloring should be allowed put into margarine packages especially for that purpose. It must be clearly labled oleo margarine and

and packaged as such. This modified bill was passed as he suggested and remained in force until just a few years ago when manufacturers were finally allowed to put color into the oleo margarine at the factories.

At the time Illinois voters had to make the decision as to whether Illinois would become a slave state or not permit slavery, Madison County was about equally divided on the issue. The Gillham family and their in-laws meant a vote of about 500 people if they voted either solidly against solidly for slavery. By that time there were about every religion, every political party and about as many opinions about everything as you could possibly find, but without exception they were against slavery. Some of the opposition realized the Gillhams and their connections certainly could throw the County either way. So, first, they tried to influence some of the individual members of the family but as they got no place with that, then they came to my grandfather and, of course, got no where with him either. Then they had the nerve to offer him a very large sum of money if he would use his influence to change the families voting. This made him so raging mad he sure did use his influence . . . to rouse the Gillhams to get out and do everything they could to stop Madison County from voting for slavery in Illinois. The County vote was not only a good majority against slavery but helped influence the state vote too.

Around 1856 Senator Gillham bought a piece of farm machinery. I am not sure but I think it was a combine or something in a heavy type machinery. The men at the farm had trouble with it and as no one knew very much about farm machinery at the time he would not permit the farm help to try to fix it, for fear of some accident hurting one of them. So he tried to fix it himself. I do not know the exact details but some belt on it either caught his leg or threw him to the ground. He had a badly broken leg in several places. The leg finally healed but he was lame for the rest of his life. Also, he had a good deal of trouble with it at times. When the Civil War came up they would not accept Senator Gillham for active service so all he could do was to devote as much time as he possibly could to raising as much food as possible to supply Army and Civilian needs. As during the later wars, farming, with most of the men in the service was tough going.

I can remember my two grandmothers telling me the problems women had, too, as the South had all the cotton so it was even difficult to get a spool of thread, which was 25 cents . . . if you could get any at all. Regardless of color, one took it as one could wait for months before finding a color one needed. Cotton materials were almost impossible to get at all.

Virginia Harrison Gillham's father, Joseph Harrison, was a Southerner and owned two plantations, one in Missouri and one in Kentucky. He also manufactured carriages, farm wagons, etc. Slaves on the plantations were inherited and had been in the families of him and his wife for several generations. In 1857 or 58 they decided slavery was wrong both from a moral standpoint and being devout Christians. It was also against their religious views. They knew freeing their slaves meant terrible financial loss to them as fine slaves were very valuable property. In spite of knowing what it would do to them financially they freed all their slaves. Freeing slaves was questionable help to slaves. There was very little work available to

them, if any at all, and also the danger of their being picked up by crooks, their papers confiscated and sold for slaves again. The slaves refused to leave the Harrisons. So they simply could not do anything but hire them to go on working on the plantations and pay them the "going" wages for their work. This meant a bad financial cramp but they were managing to make it go due to the very successful carriage and wagon business. However, when the Civil War hit them no one was buying fine carriages and wagons. Still worse they were close to where Armies on both sides were stationed and both sides just robbed and plundered anything they could get their hands on. As my grandmother was the oldest Harrison child and the next sister, Adeline Harrison was living here with the Gillhams, it left Mrs. Harrison with three younger children in the South.

Joseph Harrison died suddenly in 1861 or 62. At the time they were in Missouri but Mrs. Harrison's own people were in Kentucky (near Summerset) so she decided to take the children and freed slaves and go back to Kentucky with them. She wrote Daniel and Virginia but the letter did not get through the lines until after they had left. In the letter she told them she was very worried about the children and wished they were safely with the Gillhams in Illinois. Senator Gillham immediately got in touch with commanding Generals of both armies (through Washington) and got permission to go to Kentucky and get the children and also Mrs. Harrison if she wished to come North. Trains were in the hands of the Armies. Also the trains were in danger of being blown up or civilians being put off trains anywhere if Armies needed them. Senator Gillham was advised his best way of getting the children was to use a farm wagon and strong horses and get orders from both Generals he was not to be molested in any way, nor his horses or farm wagon taken from him. He drove to Kentucky and was stopped several times but the armies did not dare take his horses or wagon or stop him, not with the orders he had.

Mrs. Harrison took nearly 100 slaves, her children and herself and traveled cross country. All they took was food they could carry and some blankets. As they had to cross streams and avoid roads where they might run into armies, it was not only a terribly hard trip but a very dangerous one too. They made it to Kentucky but she contracted typhoid fever on the way and arrived a desperately ill woman. She only lived a few days but word did get through to her that Daniel was on his way to get them back to Illinois. He arrived there a few days after she was buried and brought the children North at once. After the war was over Senator Gillham went back South to save anything he could for the children but there was not very much left of the large fortune the Harrisons had possessed. Daniel and Virginia raised and educated the children along with their own son. The two boys graduated from Illinois University Agricultural Division, and the daughter, Belle, graduated from Illinois University and became a teacher in California for many years. When I was a small child they all came back here to visit my Grandmother Gillham who was their older sister. As the children (now a family of ten children) grew up and were school and college ages Daniel and Virginia decided to move to Upper Alton. As they needed time to look around before deciding what they wanted to buy they rented a large house on Judson Street. They were comfortable there but needed a larger house, which was not easy to find, but they found a tract of land on Leverett Avenue, East end, 3100 block, two blocks on Worden Avenue, and along

Edwards Street the 3100 block. Reverend Fields owned the property and wanted to sell it but the house, at the corner of Worden and Leverett, was very small and both realized must either be torn down or very extensive additions built on it. Suddenly my grandmother, Virginia Harrison Gillham, came down with typhoid fever and died within a few days. Where she caught typhoid fever they had no idea but my grandfather immediately questioned if it could have been from the well at the place they had rented. The day of my grandmother's funeral he went straight to Reverend Fields and bought the property (on condition that Fields move out at once which Fields agreed to do). He ordered people in to move them next day and then went home to tell Virginia's sister, Adeling Harrison, what he had done. On top of burying her sister one day and moving the next, she was simply floored but she did agree if he thought the children's safety was involved that they should move as quickly as possible. Every bit of help possible was given her to move but to cramp that family into a 5 room house was terrible. Building on to both ends of the house, front, back and even out one side soon turned it into a very large and lovely home, and it kept both of them so busy it probably did help them both recover from the loss of Virginia and the little children's loss of their mother. This house was torn down about two years ago and the new Baptist and Shurtleff Foundation are putting up a fine student center for S. I. U. students. The barn from the old house is still standing and is on my property next door to the center. On moving to Upper Alton the friendship between Dr. Aaron Kendrick, president of Shurtleff College and Daniel B. Gillham became very close. Gillham was on the board of Shurtleff College. On a smaller scale the problems of Shurtleff College were similar to those of the University so it was a help to both of them for Dr. Kendrick to tell his troubles, as a college president to D. B. Gillham and to get help from him on financial management. The Kendrick home place ran several hundred feet on Leverett just across the street from the Gillham home and through to College and Worden Avenues. There was a tall board fence with a flat board on top of it. The two men would meet and sit on this fence and talk in spite of all their families could do instead of going to either home and talking in comfort. Both had big families and probably it was the only place they could go and have no interruptions as both women would not allow them disturbed when "they too to the fence" as they laughingly called these visits.

There was a real need at the Gillham farms for the men working there to have some place to buy personal needs such as tobacco, candy, tooth paste and some clothing so Grandfather Gillham put in a small commissary for them. Items were charged for at the wholesale price he bought them and less than they could buy them at any store. Some men did not want to fool with money so he put in some metal slugs they bought from the commissary and used in place of small coins. I have one of these "Good for 5¢. D. B. Gillham."

Pay day for the men was regularly Saturday, just after noon as he drew the money in cash from the bank and went straight to the Farms to pay the men off. The only exception to this hard and fast rule was when weather conditions were so impossible he simply could not get down to the farms. Then he would go down Sunday or the minute he could get through to them. This fixed habit eventually caused his death.

Near the farms there was no close school or church and very real need for both so he told his neighbors he would provide the land to build a one room school and build it too, if they would provide the teacher. They were glad to do it so it was done. Naturally, a full time minister was out of the question so he went to Dr. Kendrick and asked that he select senior ministerial students, who needed financial help, to drive down with Senator Gillham to the school-church on the farm. He paid these students \$10.00 a Sunday out of his own pocket and they were really delighted to do it. It not only meant money they really needed but a chance to "try out their wings" at preaching. The farmers around usually asked them to go home with them to a fine Sunday dinner and a delightful day with them and then drove them back to college late afternoon or evening. One of the daughters usually went with Senator Gillham and the student preacher but they did not stay after the service except to bring the student home for dinner at Gillham's if he was not invited out by someone else.

In late winter, 1891, Senator Gillham went to the bank as usual Saturday morning but there was a very bad storm so he could not get down to the farms so had to just go home and wait until Sunday. The Court trial transcript showed up the fact later that three men had been watching him for weeks at the bank and at his home, and knew he drew the money every Saturday to take to the farm. They intended to rob him at home the first time he had to keep the money in the house overnight. Because of his lameness, his, and my grandmother's bedroom was downstairs but the rest of the family all slept upstairs.

After being a widower from 1871 to 1876, Daniel and Adeline Harrison (sister of Virginia) were married. She had been a fine mother to his children and they were all delighted when they were married.

The burglars broke into a window, very quietly, about midnight, and Senator Gillham had left his trousers on a chair at the head of the bed. He suddenly woke up and saw the thief going through his pockets. He did not stop to think but very foolishly jumped out of bed and grabbed the man and the man shot Grandfather Gillham. The gun was fired at such close range the Doctor could not get the bullet out and there were no X-rays so they could locate the place where the bullet stopped. Autopsy after his death showed it had struck a rib and following it around inside to his spine and torn everything with it before stopping. Senator Gillham died ten days later.

As he was so well known, the City, County and State Police were determined to find his murderer but it took months to do it. Three men were in on it but none would admit doing it, nor would any one of them tell which one actually did the shooting. All three went to prison for life.

It was pretty rough on my grandmother and the family having to face the police questioning, grief over his death and of course, sensational newspaper items for weeks about it and the trial. Also, they could not avoid a very public funeral when he had led such a public life. Letters, telegrams, flowers and visitors poured in from the time he was shot until after the funeral. I have dozens of letters, telegrams, and cards sent the family at that time. They are quite different from the similar type of things we all use today, but express the kindness and sympathy that our cards and letters do today. The funeral was attended by the Governor and State Officers, University people and crowds of their friends.

The Gillham children whose mother was Virginia Harrison Gillham were: Willard, Nannie, Edith (who died at the age of 12), Alice, Lillian, and Virginia. All but Lillian graduated at Shurtleff College. Her health broke down in January when she was to graduate in June so she had to stop college. Nannie, Alice and Virginia all taught at the College after graduation. Willard and Virginia went on to get higher degrees; Willard in law at the University of Illinois and Virginia at Chicago University. Virginia also spent many summers in France and Germany perfecting her accent in the languages for teaching.

Willard married and moved to California. Nannie married Rev. Thomas Young, D. D., whom she met when they both attended Shurtleff College. They moved to California and later to Colorado. Alice married Rev. Herschel Howyer, D. D.: they moved to Springfield, Decatur, and then to Cincinnati, Ohio. Lillian married Hermon Cole of Alton. They moved to Springfield, Illinois in 1914 but returned to Alton in 1932. The home they lived in after they came back here in 1932 is the house I live in now with my daughter, Mrs. Grace Fish Hamilton and grandson, Darden Cole Hamilton. The house was built by my grandmother, Adeline Gillham, about 1908 on part of the original Gillham property. My parents bought out the other heirs after the deaths of my grandmother and Aunt Virginia.

There is more about Lillian Gillham Cole and Hermon Cole in the history of the Cole family.

Written by: Cora Cole Fish
3123 Leverett Avenue
Alton, Illinois
January, 1964